

READING REVIEW



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In Just Four Months, Title I Focus School Sees Exponential Literacy Gains

In the fall of 2014, Lincoln Elementary School in the Bethlehem Area School District (Pennsylvania) engaged Step By Step Learning® to help improve the literacy skills for students in Kindergarten through 2nd grade. The Bethlehem Area School District is the sixth largest in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania with 16 neighborhood elementary schools serving grades K-5. Step By Step Learning® and in partnership with the Colonial Intermediate Unit (I.U. 20), the collaborative team designed and implemented an innovative, evidence-supported methodology that significantly and permanently improves teacher effectiveness and student performance for even the most at-risk children.

Lincoln Elementary was designated a Focus School by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. As a Title I school, Lincoln Elementary received the Focus School designation based on the objective of “closing the achievement gap of historically underperforming students; economically disadvantaged, and English language learners who score below proficient on the Pennsylvania System of

School Assessment (PSSA) exams, Keystone exams, and the PASA by 50% over a six-year period.”

With nearly 15 years of in-classroom experience with teachers, Step By Step Learning® is recognized as the preeminent educational and literacy organization that achieves positive sustainable results in schools, benefitting every child. Utilizing proven evidence-based methodologies, the Step By Step Learning® and Colonial I.U. team was tasked to:

- *Design and implement a data review process that includes collection, analysis, evaluation, and interpretation of student data to identify students at risk for reading failure, and*
- *Plan the instructional support that is needed to improve students’ reading skills.*
- *Provide professional development to teachers that would deepen their knowledge in the science of teaching reading and enhance teachers’ instructional techniques to promote more active student learning.*

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Early Childhood Education is the Foundation for Future Learning and Literacy

Participation in high-quality early childhood care and education programs can have positive effects on children’s cognitive, language, and social development, particularly among children at risk for poor outcomes.¹

Recent federal funding and some state mandates have increased the focus on early childhood education. Educators have been exploring children’s development and the opportunities to intervene before students matriculate to Kindergarten. Step By Step Learning® has been involved with several Pennsylvania schools over the past three years that have received a KTO grant for the birth to age five population. Two examples include Carbondale Area Elementary in the Carbondale Area School District and Mifflin County School District, which includes Indian Valley Elementary.

See EARLY CHILDHOOD, page 4

School Leaders – How to Recognize a Truly Effective Reading Program

More and more, states are focusing on teacher and principal evaluation and accountability. This means that school leadership must be proactive and knowledgeable about effective curricula and programs that actually teach their students. With all of the responsibilities and day-to-day issues that school principals have to manage, sometimes it is hard to know what techniques are actually working. When it comes to teaching students to read, Step By Step Learning’s® *Literacy Leadership* course helps school leaders – Principals, Assistant/Vice Principals, Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents, Executive Directors, and others – clearly identify and understand the finer points of what to look for in good reading instruction.

“Schools are asking us to help increase teacher effectiveness during reading instruction and intervention times,” comments MaryDoe Donecker, Vice President with Step By Step Learning®. “With current market conditions, what we’re finding out there is that schools and school leaders are looking for help because they just don’t always know what effective reading instruction looks like. They want their students to succeed and it’s hard for them to rise above the daily swirl of activity to really focus on what is working, or identify what isn’t working.”

So how does a school leader recognize a truly effective reading program? Step By Step Learning® can

help! The *Literacy Leadership* course offered by Step By Step Learning® teaches leaders how to identify best practices in literacy and implement them effectively in their school or district. This is a hands-on training course for every administrator and it is the only course of its kind. It walks you through everything you need to know to implement a comprehensive Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS-new term replaces RtI or RtII) process in your school.

The Step By Step Learning® course, “Leadership and Literacy: Implementing Reading Research Best Practices,” 32 hours of the course are classroom hours with the remaining 16 hours dedicated to coaching school leaders exactly what they need to do to produce a comprehensive Multi-Tiered System of Supports (Response to Instruction and Intervention) program.

This *Literacy Leadership* course surveys the evidence-supported best practices for assessment, instruction, professional development, and resource allocation to positively affect student literacy and achievement. “During the course, participants consider these best practices and determine the best actions to take when implementing the practices in their respective districts, based on their local conditions and resources. The course is built around planning, documenting, and communicating a measurable goal for their students to attain, and outlining the necessary tools and resources to implement a successful MTSS literacy program that will raise student literacy and achievement”, says MaryDoe Donecker.

Both during and after the course, participants develop an actual School Literacy Plan - around these best practices, and it is this research and commitment that focuses a school’s/district’s literacy initiative for the entire school year. The Plan includes specific activities and goals to support an effective

literacy program. This School Literacy Plan is the public document that outlines the school’s/district’s commitments to reading instruction. It describes the goals set for the students, and what the administrators and instructional leaders will do to make sure the children reach the goals set for them. The School Literacy Plan acts as a blueprint to plan how effective

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Since September of the 2014 school-year, the team has been working with Kindergarten, first grade, and second grade teachers to increase their knowledge and understanding surrounding the science of teaching reading to young children, and how to collect, interpret, and understand student data. Teachers are benefitting from customized lesson plans and classroom engagement techniques that help strengthen their instruction and effectiveness, as well as from consistent and frequent in-person, side-by-side follow-up support. After just four months of program implementation with K-1, which includes personalized in-classroom modeling and coaching, LETRS® content training, Connecting to the Classroom® sessions, and Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) protocols, there already has been unprecedented improvements in students' reading skills.

that we could help them. Their willingness to learn new information about how to teach reading, take risks in trying new (and sometimes uncomfortable) unfamiliar instructional strategies, and be open to constructive feedback has been the key to early and significant success for their students. “

Teachers can sometimes be nervous about trying new things in their classrooms because they don't want the kids to fail, but they soon learned that by making slight modifications to their teaching approaches, they can achieve significant quantifiable improvements in their students' understanding and retention. The methodologies taught by the in-classroom Step By Step Learning® consultants allow teachers to actively use the data they collect for each child and focus on the academic growth of all students.

Some challenges that were specific to Lincoln

	Before Step By Step Learning®		After Step By Step Learning®	
	% FALL 2013	% WINTER 2014	% FALL 2014	% WINTER 2015
Kindergarten	35	54	29	79
First Grade	81	78	60	82

Comparing the winter of 2014 to the winter 2015, there was a 46% improvement in the number of students meeting the overall benchmark goals and the students began the year six (6) percentage points more at risk in Fall of 2014 than in the comparison year of 2013. No other previous year has ever seen anywhere near that increase. In the past two years only 54% of children reached the Winter benchmark. This year 79% of Kindergarten students met the Winter benchmark goals this year. What an increase! Thank you Bethlehem teachers!

Lincoln Elementary, with a large minority and poor student population of struggling English language learners, has exceeded its mid-year goals for K-1, which happened through the integration of a highly collaborative, structured, and a customized intervention response program. With approximately 215 students in the school, the student population is predominantly bi-lingual (54%) compared to other schools in the district that average around 30%. Over 60% of Lincoln Elementary's students are eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Achieving such impressive results in such a short time is not easy, particularly with the demographic make-up of the school's youngest students. Such achievement requires dedication and commitment and a willingness to think and act differently in the classroom. Pam Hill, a consultant with Step By Step Learning®, said, “The teachers at Lincoln Elementary have been open to the possibility of positive change from the first day we met. They have a strong desire to help improve their students' literacy skills and trusted

Elementary included the use of multiple literacy programs during classroom instruction that were detached from each other. Phonics instruction was isolated from text reading, and text reading was not supported by the vocabulary lessons, for example. The Step By Step Learning® team reviewed these programs and recommended ways to make them more cohesive and complimentary instead of uncoordinated. Additionally, a science-based approach was presented to the teachers that outlined the significant milestones that each student should master by mid-year and end-of-year, enabling them to adjust the timing or techniques in their teaching to help each student reach his/her literacy goals. Ms. Hill commented, “We are teaching with the end in mind. Our teachers are now asking themselves, ‘what do I need to teach in November to meet these goals in January?’ They are realigning their pacing to meet the program stretch-goals and surpass the general grade-level standards.”

The Bethlehem Area School District partnered with Step By Step Learning® specifically for the company's expertise in school improvement. Many Focus Schools are spending money on their reading and literacy programs, but not improving at this pace. Step By Step Learning® teamed with the district, performed a systems and processes audit (Gap Analysis), and focused on building a collaborative culture. In its first year of implementation, the teachers are seeing real improvement in their students' reading and comprehension.

Lincoln Elementary's K-1 results speak for themselves.

I Hear and I Forget, I See and I Remember, I Do and I Understand

It does not surprise anyone to learn that one of the most consistent findings in educational research demonstrates that the more time students spend engaged during instruction, the more they learn.¹ Active engagement stimulates students intellectually, emotionally, socially, and physically as they learn. Teachers who use active engagement techniques notice that students learn skills and concepts more deeply. Active engagement keeps students attentive and involved in learning rather than inattentive bystanders who may or may not be paying full attention to a lecture. Listening to a lecture is a passive activity, so finding ways to make it an active activity will better facilitate learning, understanding, and retention. Additionally, teacher evaluations now require them to demonstrate active learning in their classrooms from Kindergarten through 12th grade.

Multi-sensory teaching makes learning easier

According to the National Education Association, “when students are actively engaged, they focus on what is being taught and better process new information. Because the most effective teaching takes place in ‘chunks’, it is best to teach new information or concepts in 7-10 minute segments followed by a processing activity. When students are actively engaged in their learning, they are processing and retaining information and using higher order thinking. When teachers design activities that promote active engagement, they are reinforcing student learning, keeping students interested and on-task, and making learning fun.”

“Teachers must appreciate what recent research in cognitive psychology has confirmed: namely, students learn through active intellectual engagement with content.”

– Charlotte Danielson,
The Framework for Teaching

There are several ways to increase student engagement. We know that involved students learn more efficiently and effectively and are more successful at remembering what they learned. Plus, students who are engaged in learning are more likely to become passionate about learning in general as they grow. Student engagement is one by-product of effective instruction that has significant pay-back. A 2002 report from Schlechty outlines seven ways to increase student engagement, which are modeled by Step By Step Learning consultants during their Connecting to the Classroom™ sessions.

- **10:2 method** – for every 10 minutes of instruction, allow the students 2 minutes to process and respond to the instruction; Step By Step Learning® uses partner chatter and quick writes in many of their sessions; having students write what they learned or ask questions are excellent methods
- **Integrate movement into lessons** – students should be encouraged to respond to a question by moving to a certain spot in the room, writing on white/chalk boards, or standing/

See I HEAR, page 6

Contact our clients to see how we helped put together the 'pieces' for literacy success

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Planning the Work, Working the Plan: How One District Substantially Improved Student Outcomes and Reading Scores

– As Evidenced by a Lehigh University Study

Step By Step Learning® MTSS Intervention Works!

Pleasant Valley School District’s youngest students were struggling. Administrators and teachers knew something had to be changed, so in 2006, a Step By Step Learning® Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) was implemented. [MTSS is a newly adopted term that replaces RtI or RtII, Response to Intervention and Instruction.]. Between 2006-2012, Kindergarten, First, and Second grade teachers at Pleasant Valley have received detailed instructions for implementing the universal MTSS process, including:

- Data analysis & informal diagnostics mapping
- Student Intervention Response meetings
- LETRS® professional development
- Connecting to the Classroom™
- Instructional modeling & coaching
- Small group toolkits for interventions
- Leadership Course focused on writing a detailed literacy plan (PILS Approved-45 hrs.)
- Teach Me To Read At Home™... a family literacy training program for their Pre-K families

DIBELS® data had been collected for all Kindergarten students for four years (2002-2006) prior to the MTSS implementation. Lehigh University’s Center for Promoting Research to Practice conducted an independent study: a detailed consultative gap analysis report was presented to the administration in the middle and end of each year to understand the course of action necessary, and outcomes of the MTSS implementation were measured.

The results were astonishing! The study found that tremendous gains in student achievement levels were realized during between 2006-2012—concurrent with the development and implementation of Step By Step Learning’s® universal MTSS framework. The systematic infrastructure, essential elements and decision-making processes had dramatically accelerated student learning

1/2 Day Kindergarten
“The results show that growth rates for every child increased significantly during the Step By Step Learning® MTSS school year (see chart to the right). This was accomplished within a half-day Kindergarten setting with 20-23 students per class. “

Over five years First Grade teachers reduced the number of students referred for Special Education by 57%, from 47 in 2006-2007 to 20 in 2012. Furthermore, fewer than 2% of the 2012-2013 4th and 5th grade students were found to require decoding intervention. The system works!

The study results indicate that the training process offered by Step By Step Learning® to Pleasant Valley teachers significantly and substantially improved student outcomes—well above those achieved using the instructional process evident in the previous school years (2002-2006).

Prior to Step By Step Learning’s® MTSS process implementation, the Kindergarten students at Pleasant

Valley benchmarked in the 45%-55% range. Compare that to the 90%+ of students currently benchmarked at the end of the year. The increase is remarkable: you can see the exponential growth of the students, the capacity building of the teachers’ instructional techniques and the sustainability that was achieved.

With Step By Step Learning’s® guidance, Pleasant Valley realized a 50% increase in student achievement at the end of the first year (2006-2007), and the Kindergarten students attained 90% benchmark by Spring 2008 and has sustained 90% each year. The sustained commitment to the process has paid dividends for ALL.

Since the 2006-2007 school year, First Grade teachers have reduced the number of students referred for Special Education from 47 in 2006-2007 to 20. Furthermore, fewer than 2% of the 2012-2013 4th and 5th grade students are found to require decoding intervention. **The evidence is conclusive: Step By Step Learning’s® MTSS process works!**

PLEASANT VALLEY RESULTS 2002 - 2015			
½ Day Kindergarten Program Excels			
	FALL	WINTER	SPRING
2002-2003	38	41	46
2003-2004	38	44	49
2004-2005	45	45	55
2005-2006	42	33	52
2006-2007*	43	54	72
2007-2008	54	65	82
2008-2009	58	79	91
2009-2010	61	82	92
2010-2011	59	85	94
2011-2012	67	91	93
2012-2013	65	86	93
2013-2014	65	82	92
2014-2015	53	86	
First Grade Program Excels			
	FALL	WINTER	SPRING
2006-2007	60	68	75
2007-2008	68	65	77
2008-2009	74	71	91
2009-2010	80	84	94
2010-2011	83	81	89
2011-2012	54	80	87
2012-2013	71	87	89
2013-2014	67	73	87
2014-2015	69	84	
Second Grade Program Excels			
	FALL	WINTER	SPRING
2007-2008	63	76	71
2008-2009	69	80	80
2009-2010	72	87	85
2010-2011	76	91	88
2011-2012	81	88	87
2012-2013	81	79	85
2013-2014	87	87	89
2014-2015	82	89	

*Step By Step Learning® began the MTSS project in 2006

reading instruction will be delivered in the district and addresses key day-to-day issues that instructional leaders must facilitate to ensure student achievement.

“Our team went through the Leadership Literacy training. My team gained so much from the experience. We wrote a divisional (K-4) Literacy Plan that we use as the blueprint for all that we do. When we came back and began working with teachers, it was so exciting to see that the vision and core values we established as a leadership team matched those that the teachers identified. The enthusiasm we generated within our staff was exciting. When we have a discussion about our reading program, we look back to our Plan to ensure we are staying on track.” – Carole Geary, Superintendent, Pleasant Valley School District

“The course and the literacy plan that is developed, helps to define what we should be looking for in teacher accountability,” comments Annelle Prefontaine, Director of Federal Programs and Grants, (retired), for East Stroudsburg Area School District. “The literacy plan targets what we should be looking for as we do walk-throughs and classroom observations. It defines what makes a good instructor. You could do walk-throughs and observations forever, but if you don’t have a check-list of the instructional strategies you should be looking for, then it doesn’t do you much good.”

Ms. Prefontaine adds, “We got more out of the program than we initially expected. When you can get all the Principals together at the same time and share ideas and talk about our expectations for our schools, there is a huge value. We get everyone on the same page about why we need improvements in our schools and we build a common vision.”

In addition to in-class time, participants also create a portfolio that documents their implementation of the School Literacy Plan and the literacy initiative(s) at their school(s). “Implementing, monitoring, and revising the plan is what directly impacts student achievement,” says Ms. Donecker. “It is executing what you learn that gets the results and this course supports Principals in implementing what they learned. You have the content, but if you don’t put it into practice you can’t impact student learning.”

The coursework culminates with a 1-2 page report about the effectiveness of the School Literacy Plan implementation. What worked and what didn’t work? What challenges were faced and how were they overcome? What were the results and how did the Plan impact student achievement? What would be done differently next year?

An extremely valuable added benefit of this course is the on-going support provided to participants for the entire school year. “On-going support during the school year is part of the course and is included in the course fee,” comments Ms. Donecker. “We provide support by sending reminder emails, for example, to prompt Principals to schedule a meeting with teachers to discuss a particular topic. All attendees have found this on-going support to be extremely beneficial, particularly since school leaders’ days are always so demanding.”

Ms. Prefontaine concurs, “The MTSS (RtII) process that we are taught is very beneficial and the literacy plan is extremely critical to our school improvement efforts, keeping us on track and focused. It is so helpful to have a structure and guidance to keep us moving forward. The support and follow-up from Step By Step Learning® is extremely valuable.”

For more information about a comprehensive MTSS Implementation, contact Step By Step Learning® at 610-398-1231 or visit www.sbsl.org

Early childhood education and oral language skills

Each \$1 invested in quality early childhood education results in a \$7 return.²

Reading comprehension depends on language abilities that have been developing since birth. Basic vocabulary and grammar are clearly essential to comprehension because each enables understanding of words and their inter-relationships in and across individual sentences in a text.³

The early childhood education program in Mifflin County has increased its communication and influence over the past couple of years, including reaching out to parents, sending books home, and establishing connections with pediatricians. It is well known that oral language is a fundamental cornerstone for early literacy. Children generally cannot comprehend as much written text as what they can understand orally and the critical birth to five age bracket when they are learning to speak and express ideas should not be under-served.

Mifflin County understands this and has incorporated comprehensive early childhood and oral language techniques in its pre-K partner classrooms. The early education teachers are reinforcing their understanding of what it is to be an active listener and to recognize the underlying foundation of phonological processing and how it relates to early language and early literacy skills development.

Mifflin County's student population consists of many at-risk children. As part of its KTO grant application process, the school district established several long-range, birth-to-five literacy goals:

1. Increase the number of students that enter Kindergarten with the necessary fundamental literacy skills from 52% to 85% by 2017.
2. Families will have an understanding of the importance of providing evidence-based, literacy-rich opportunities, ensuring children develop the appreciation for the sounds of language through songs, imitation, and play. Increase the number of families that report an understanding of evidence-based literacy knowledge from 12.5% to 60% by 2017.
3. Early childhood educators will have a command of evidence-based, literacy-rich instruction, ensuring children develop foundational literacy skills. Offer evidence-based training to 100% of early childhood partners by the end of 2015.
4. Community members and stakeholders will have an understanding of the relevance and importance of early literacy skills and of community resources and support networks. Increase the number of community members and stakeholders in early literacy initiatives each program year.
5. Early childhood providers will have the necessary materials to implement evidence-based literacy instruction.

"The training we have received over the past months has been very beneficial," said Karen Shelato, Head Start Teacher, Snyder Union Mifflin Child Development, Inc. "We are implementing language skills in the classroom in all of the developmental areas which has proven to increase the child's language abilities."

"The program Teach Me To Read At Home™ provided an avenue for us to look at what we're

doing. We recognized that there was a better way of teaching our kids. And that we need more training and professional development. This led to us getting LETRS® Early Childhood, Connecting to the Classroom™, and the modeling and coaching. It helped us organize what we were doing in a systematic way to help our kids." - The Pre-K team at Edison Local School District

The Carbondale School District also engaged Step By Step Learning® to assist with early childhood education for its four pre-K classrooms. Since the pre-K teachers had attended early childhood training previously, they benefitted greatly by doing the Connecting to the Classroom™ program that applies the LETRS® instruction directly to students. The personalized coaching and modeling enabled the pre-K teachers to better prepare their students for Kindergarten. Although this is the first school-year working with the pre-K teachers in Carbondale, the program is already reaping benefits. Before the beginning of the school year, Step By Step Learning® consultants delivered a full-day Connecting to the Classroom™ session designed specifically for early childhood and reviewed the foundational skills in LETRS® training. Because the oral language component is so critical to Carbondale's youngest students, oral language lessons were modeled to demonstrate how to introduce vocabulary words in engaging ways. A second modeling session in the winter focused on language stimulation techniques in a playtime environment.

"We have improved our literacy instruction in order to help all of our students build a strong foundation in oral language, phonemic awareness, and print knowledge. The specific focus on oral language stimulation in my classroom has helped me to successfully build and strengthen my students'

vocabulary over the past several months in preparation for their transition to Kindergarten. I look forward to continuing our journey with SBSL to develop oral language and critical thinking skills through block play over the next few weeks." – Pre-K Classroom Teacher, Carbondale Area School District.

"The teachers at Carbondale are loving it because they feel supported," commented Helen Bispels, a senior Step By Step Learning® consultant. "They appreciate the modeling sessions and watching someone work with their kids in the classroom and talk about their particular needs. The coaching framework may take a little time to fully grasp, but they are more than willing to try new methods. They appreciate that we keep coming back, revisiting and reinforcing the techniques, and helping them change their habits for the long-term." The Step By Step Learning® methodologies are successful because the team asks a lot of questions and focuses on repetition and enforcement. It is not a one-visit-and-we're-done relationship.

It is important to know that, although each Step By Step Learning® program is customized to the needs of each District, School, and/or Teacher and classroom, the consultants make sure they work within the structured guidelines of what a pre-K day should look like, to remain compliant with Carbondale's guidelines, as well as Head Start's guidelines. "We help them fit the new concepts into what they're already doing," comments Mrs. Bispels. "They don't have to change what they're doing, just how they do it."

¹ Child Trends Databank, 2014

² Early Childhood Education brief published by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, 2012

³ Kintsch and Kintsch, 2005

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Wilkes-Barre, a KTO District, Overcomes District-wide Poverty to Achieve Reading Success

Wilkes-Barre Area School District is in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, and includes five elementary schools that support 24 Kindergarten classrooms and 24 first grade classrooms with around 500 students in each grade level. Four of the five elementary schools in the district are among the highest in the state for their economically disadvantaged populations. There is also an unusually high transient rate in this school district, which poses unique challenges across the board. The area's low socio-economic status results in free or reduced breakfast and lunch for more than two-thirds of the students in the district. In four of the five elementary buildings, more than 8 out of every 10 students qualify for free or reduced lunch. As a comparison, the Pennsylvania state average for free and reduced lunch is 45% and the national average is 55%.

A student who finished second grade without being able to read has only a 1 in 4 chance of reading at grade level by the end of elementary school. ¹

Dodson Elementary School is the most impoverished elementary school in the district with 91% economically disadvantaged and has consistently been designated as a Tier III chronically low achieving school by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Research indicates that if Tier II and Tier III intervention programs are implemented with fidelity, over 90% of students can achieve core/benchmark status in grades K-2. This is exactly what Wilkes-Barre school district has accomplished. There is no evidence to excuse poor reading performance with schools that are as impoverished as Dodson.

Prior to Step By Step Learning's intervention in Wilkes-Barre three years ago, the classroom teachers taught reading in isolation and were solely responsible for progress monitoring, calculating and inputting data into the computer system, establishing intensive and strategic groups, small group and individualized instruction, and other activities while the Title I teacher was solely responsible for benchmark testing.

If identified early and given research-based intervention, 90-95% of children at risk for reading failure will become fluent readers. ²

Now, all teachers and building Principals work together and support each other to provide a cohesive system to ensure student literacy achievement. By working smarter and together, the entire teaching team – classroom teachers, Title I teachers, aides, tutors, the Step By Step Learning® in-classroom facilitator and mentor, and the building Principal – is responsible for progress monitoring, professional development, benchmark assessment, and small group and individualized student instruction so no child gets left behind. The Wilkes-Barre elementary teaching team uses explicit modeled lessons and benefits from in-classroom, personal mentoring and coaching from the Step By Step Learning® consultant. Targeted small group intervention logs are used to keep track

of students' progress and differentiated small group instruction materials and manipulatives are provided as part of the complete program so teachers no longer have to create their own materials and can instead use that time to interact with the children.

Prevention of reading failure can reduce the need for special education services later in a student's educational life. Special education costs are, on average, double those of general education. ³

“Over the past three years Step By Step Learning® has given me the resources to substantially improve my student's academic achievement. The small group intervention kits and side-by-side coaching support helped me to work smarter and not harder. This program has given me the gift of time by teaching me the importance of explicit teaching throughout the core and small group enrichment time. My students know what is expected of them and are mastering important reading skills earlier in the year.” – Maria Unice, Kindergarten Teacher, Leo E. Solomon-Plains Elementary School

Competent readers developed through early detection and assistance will go on to succeed in both academics and life, reducing the need for expensive and expansive government sponsored social programs. ⁴

Since embarking on the journey to ultimately achieve a 100% benchmark through Step By Step Learning's® comprehensive early childhood and oral language program, the Wilkes-Barre Kindergarten benchmark has increased from 49% in fall 2014 to 81% in winter 2015, a 65% improvement rate – and the benchmark goal for Kindergarten at the end of this school year is to reach 88%. Looks like a piece of cake for this team!

The program was customized for the five elementary schools in the Wilkes-Barre school district. Step By Step Learning® delivered a full strand of programming and intervention methodologies, including instructional modeling and coaching, student intervention response meetings, progress monitoring, performance monitoring, and middle-of-year and end-of-year meetings with building leadership teams to create a comprehensive literacy plan. The National Reading Panel's assessment states that the best approach to reading instruction is one that incorporates explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, systematic phonics instruction, methods to improve fluency, and ways to improve comprehension. The teachers are embracing the process and “working smarter, not harder”. Changes in instructional techniques and implementation of a comprehensive plan have enabled the dramatic improvement in literacy for the Kindergarteners at Wilkes-Barre.

See WILKES-BARRE, page 8

Small Group Instruction: It's Harder than You Think

The Florida Center for Reading Research recommends implementing differentiated instruction in small group settings to help students improve their reading skills. Small group instruction matches instruction to the different needs of students in a given classroom. In order to accommodate the wide range of instructional needs within a single classroom, it is recommended that teachers plan for:

- *Small group, differentiated instruction*
- *Ample student practice opportunities in the form of Reading Centers.*

Small group instruction should be implemented during the designated block of time for reading or intervention instruction. Schools are beginning to realize that they cannot meet the challenges of its students' individual needs unless they provide small group instruction that is differentiated based on the individual needs of the children. Ideally, teachers will use assessment data and ongoing assessments to fine tune which concepts the students are ready for and what concepts should be taught each day, and provide truly differentiated instruction, giving each student precisely what he/she needs at that particular moment.

In theory, this holds true, but in general practice, classroom management can be an issue, making the implementation of small group instruction more challenging. “It's more of a science than you think it is,” comments Mary Doe Donecker, the Vice President of professional development and consultant with Step By Step Learning®. She continues, “it is not cut and dry and does require a great deal of development. Schools rely on Step By Step Learning® because we understand the science of how to plan, organize, and execute small group instruction seamlessly and effectively.”

Deborah Glaser, co-author and national trainer of LETRS agrees that “small group instruction is not easy to do and do well.” “The small groups are flexing all the time. It requires a knowledgeable teacher who knows how to teach explicitly, how to manage behavior, how to engage students in the learning process, and how to provide extended practice.”

Small group instruction was not as consistent as it is today. “Step By Step Learning® trained us how to form the groups and what to do with the kids once they're in the groups,” commented Dawn Dougherty, Title 1 Reading Teacher. “They gave us information about what to do in the classroom. The Step By Step Learning® consultants are very helpful.” Small group instruction has become more effective because they are specifically targeting weak skills. “The assessments we did before were not detailed by the skills we needed to teach. Now we run skill-based groups with smaller groups of kids. Everybody is doing them and we're all on the same page.”

Sometimes, schools find it difficult to schedule these small group instruction times, and want to do small group instruction when a teacher's aide and/or Title teacher are available. Teachers often ask, “we have so much to teach, when do I fit this in?” This is where support from administrators can be extremely helpful. School principals and administrators need to make small group instruction scheduling a priority. According to Jan Humes, a senior consultant with Step By Step Learning® who has helped design and implement small group instruction programs for many schools, “if the school really wants to be successful, they have to have the backing of the administrators, and the administrators have to go through training to really understand what all this means. Many principals

See SMALL GROUP, page 7

sitting when they are done thinking about the question; *Step By Step Learning*[®] explores ways to physically engage children during lessons through multi-sensory activities such as stretching and pulling sounds, stomping syllables, walking words, etc.

- **Pick up the pace** – a common misconception is that we must teach slowly for students to really understand and engage in a lesson. There is much evidence that shows when teaching is at a brisk instructional pace, children have more opportunities to engage, respond, and move on to the next concept.²
- **Provide frequent and effective feedback.** The *Step By Step Learning*[®] consultant discusses the importance of corrective and constructive feedback. Using an acronym of RECS to help teachers remember key steps in providing corrective feedback. *Recognize what the student did correctly. Point out the Error. Correct the error. Ask the Student to provide the full answer correctly.*
- **Allow students 5-7 seconds of “think time”** when asking a question. *Step By Step Learning*[®] refers to this as “wait time.” At the end of the “wait time”, select a student at random to answer the question.
- **At the end of the lesson, have students use the 3-2-1 method** of summarizing or restating what they learned; *Step By Step Learning*[®] encourages teachers to ask children to record or comment on three things they learned, two interesting things, and one question they have about what was taught.
- **Periodically pause mid-sentence.** This engages students and requires them to fill-in the blank space. *Step By Step Learning*[®] models this strategy during *Connecting to the Classroom*[™] sessions, which support teachers in connecting research to practice. It is also a critical element of Early Childhood education strategies.

Teacher effectiveness is paramount

In addition to improving student understanding and retention of important concepts, active engagement is a key issue for teachers whose performance and effectiveness are being evaluated based on their active engagement competency. As an example, according to the Pennsylvania Code §354.33. Professional Competency, paragraph (E): The teacher uses an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation. *Step By Step Learning*[®] uses a proven model to help teachers hone their active engagement skills through the *Connecting to the Classroom*[™] series.

“High levels of active engagement during lessons are associated with higher levels of achievement and student motivation.”

– Ryan and Deci, 2000

“We saw a direct correlation toward teacher effectiveness after we started an active engagement program,” commented Dr. TC Chappelle, Superintendent, Indian Creek Local School District. “Our students are moving in and out of intervention



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIzsN9J94k-8&feature=youtu.be>

groups with these skills mastered through purposeful movement and multi-sensory activities ... ‘what fires together wires together’ ... the brain and body are working together to master these reading skills.”

Connecting to the Classroom[™] - Active engagement success at Carbondale

The best instructional strategies are embodied in LETRS[®] professional development and *Connecting to the Classroom*[™] process that shows teachers how to directly transfer their LETRS[®] knowledge to their students through small group exercise and active engagement.

“Step By Step Learning[®] connects reading research and knowledge directly to the classroom through instructional materials, coaching, and a method for monitoring what teachers are doing in instruction.”

– Dr. Louisa Moats, Author of LETRS[®]

Step By Step Learning[®] has been focusing on personalized, in-classroom support of teachers in applying active engagement in their classrooms. How do we engage the children intellectually and physically to keep their attention?

Pam Reagle, a senior *Step By Step Learning*[®] consultant, comments, “Active engagement is not hard. Nothing we’re talking about is hard, but it’s an intentional change in instructional practices, changing habits, changing routines. It does require time for planning and preparation and developing a mindfulness about what teachers are going to intentionally do in the classroom. There is never enough time, so this is the real challenge. Plan ahead. What are the questions you’re going to ask? What are the related vocabulary words? How are you going to develop these? This is what we do really well at *Step By Step Learning*[®].”

“The *Connecting to the Classroom*[™] program series combined with small group instruction truly supports professional understanding about taking research and applying it to our daily practice in the classroom. The coaching and modeling is what supports teachers in truly changing their instructional practices, which makes a huge difference for the kids. This is what we do really well.”

¹ Gettinger and Ball, 2007

² Carmine and Fink, 1978; Williams 1993; Ernsbarger et al, 2001

Working Side-by-Side with Teachers in the Classroom

Some of the most fervent comments we hear back from schools and educators is how impressed they are with the knowledge level of our *Step By Step Learning*[®] team. Because our Associates are former classroom teachers and trained by leading literacy professionals, they are certified and demonstrate a high degree of knowledge and confidence in teaching reading. We are evidence-based in our approach so you won’t find us discussing the “flavor of the year.” Our Associates build strong, trusting relationships with our partner schools. The level of support that is provided is outstanding, but the relationship between the *Step By Step Learning*[®] Associates and the teachers is special: a strong bond of mutual trust and respect is created.

Teachers want to help all children learn to read. *Step By Step Learning*[®] wants to help all children learn to read. We take the time to get to know the school, the teachers, and the students so the best approach can be customized.

All schools can benefit from some level of focus on reading, increasing teachers’ knowledge and skills about current best practices, then working to bring those hard to reach populations of students up to higher levels of achievement. The United States is currently in a reading crisis. There are so many children who are not learning to read, but should be. Schools and districts are trying anything they can to overcome the reading gaps, but successful outcomes are not realized soon enough. Often, using school level experts alone may not be enough. An outside consultant who complements and shares their vision can offer a unique perspective.

What schools are finding they need are: 1. Accurate and timely data to help determine where, specifically, a student is struggling; and, 2. Detailed and experiential knowledge of best practices to create an action plan and execution strategy to solve the problem.

It’s a team effort

Step By Step Learning[®] has supported schools in bringing struggling and at-risk students up to reading grade level. And this is done in a very different way from other professional development companies. Our consultants create trusting partnerships with teachers in their classrooms. As former educators, our team draws on its classroom and administrative experiences to coach school personnel. Coaching and mentoring is embedded into all professional development support. Decades of experience and success teaching struggling students how to read has proven that “what we do with

Connecting to the Classroom: Why it benefits our kids.

Step By Step Learning® has developed courses that are...Connecting to the Classroom™ - a series of training sessions that have been carefully designed to help teachers connect their previous training (LETRS®) and knowledge about how students learn to read and transfer the knowledge into a classroom environment as lessons and interventions. There are five modules in the Connecting to the Classroom™ series, which compliment some of the LETRS® modules. These include:

1. *Connect to the Classroom: Phonics and Spelling™*
2. *Connect to the Classroom: Vocabulary™*
3. *Connect to the Classroom: Phonology™*
4. *Connect to the Classroom: Routines of a Polished Phonics Lesson™*
5. *Connect to the Classroom: Planning Meaningful Fun For All Students While I Teach Small Groups™*

LETRS® training is very valuable to teachers, giving them insight into the research behind reading and literacy. LETRS® training is the initial presentation of the research, and a vast amount of information and data is presented in a short period of time. It can be challenging for teachers to fully absorb the information as well as its implications for students who have varying levels of reading skills and abilities. Dr. Deborah Glaser, co-author and national trainer of LETRS® advises, “The LETRS® curricula is very complex. A small percentage of information is actually retained and implemented by teachers without

expert-level coaching support by a knowledgeable expert following the training. Teachers don’t have time to investigate and apply the research themselves so we give them the Connecting to the Classroom™ support.” The Connecting to the Classroom™ training developed by Step By Step Learning® facilitates the movement of knowledge from the training to the teaching techniques in the classroom. “We need to support our teachers in ways that impact student performance. Step By Step Learning® bridges the gap between the research and classroom practice”, comments Mike Grabarits, President of Step By Step Learning, LLC.

“We are tying-in the support from Step By Step Learning® with our RtI program involving our first grade teachers. The teachers are receiving training and coaching and instructional strategies for their students. We were missing the coaching piece and this is a key element for us. Step By Step Learning® has on-going professional development that is very targeted and very specific to help our teachers grow, and connect what they know to their classroom work.”, says Phil Giaquinto, Principal at Plainfield Elementary School in the Pen Argyl School District.

Phil Giaquinto continues, “We brought in Step By Step Learning® after attending several conferences over the years and realizing that all of the “success stories” presented by other schools and school districts all had Step By Step Learning® behind them. We randomly chose presentations that

were of interest to us, and it got our attention that Step By Step Learning® was always involved.” “We also knew of the successes they had with our neighboring school district, Pleasant Valley. The folks at Pleasant Valley have nothing but good things to say about Step By Step Learning®. In Pen Argyl, we have the same wish for our students to be great. We want our school to be the best and the Step By Step Learning® team can help get us there.” He adds, “We’re doing things and implementing strategies and targeting what we need to do with students that we’ve never done before. The Step By Step Learning® team has a very specific plan to follow and it’s very helpful for my teachers, who are doing it with fidelity.”

The value provided by the Step By Step Learning® team and its Connecting to the Classroom™ program is evident in this response from Alisa Willey, the then Assistant Superintendent of Union City Area School District, “Our whole encounter of working with Step By Step Learning® has been a positive experience for several years. We have been treated with respect as our programs were reviewed and suggestions for change were made and implemented. Their staff is a dedicated, knowledgeable and caring group of individuals that have become a part of our District team. The program is research-based, with evidence that provides the effectiveness of strategic best practices. **If I were to give Step By Step Learning® a grade for effort, effectiveness, and dedication, I would give them an A+ !!**”

SMALL GROUP, page 5 continued

wear many hats and it’s hard for them to do this, but it is really critical to ultimately getting results. This is a missing piece in so many schools.” She continues, “the schools where Step By Step Learning’s programs are most successful are schools where the administration is actively involved.”

Jen Palmer, a second grade teacher in the Brookville Area School District said this about the small group instruction support offered by Step By Step Learning®: “They do it in a totally different way than we’ve ever done it before. We had lots of training, and after the kids were DIBEL’d and given an Informal Diagnostic, we looked at the scores and determined which kids we could group together by skill areas. Our Step By Step Learning® consultant helped us figure out how many kids we could have in each group and helped us pull lessons from our classroom materials to use with the intervention groups. The training is very intensive and the Step By Step Learning® consultant coaches and observes teachers as we do this. Without this support and training, I wouldn’t have known what to do. They provide a very systematic way of how to group kids and the specific ways to help them.” This is what gets results!

Step By Step Learning® has a set of tool kits that help make small group instruction more effective. “Teachers and aides really love the tool kits because everything is all set up for them,” commented Jan Humes. “They don’t have to hunt for pictures or supplies or come up with the materials and lessons or activities. It is really easy to use.”

Ms. Humes describes a dramatic example of how well small group instruction, coupled with other elements of reading instruction, can help students improve their reading proficiency. “During the course of the school year, a Kindergarten teacher diligently used the training, coaching, and tools provided by Step By Step Learning® with his students, and was able to dramatically raise the kids from a 12% benchmark starting point to 100% benchmarked by the end of the school year. When they returned the following fall in first grade, the same group of kids benchmarked at about 85%, retaining most of what they had learned the previous school year. These kids were really prepared for first grade.”

How do I connect LETRS® to my classroom everyday?

Learn How to Transfer your LETRS® Knowledge Directly to your Students and Connect LETRS® to the Classroom in Small Group Exercises.

Step By Step Learning® has developed a very targeted training program that help teachers take the knowledge they learned during LETRS® training and apply it in a real-world classroom setting.

This program – Connecting to the Classroom™ – is a series of training sessions that have been carefully designed to help teachers connect their previous knowledge about how students learn to read and transfer that knowledge directly into the classroom.

The Connecting to the Classroom™ program includes five modules, which directly correlate to the LETRS® modules:

1. *Connecting to the Classroom: Phonology™*
2. *Connecting to the Classroom: Phonics and Spelling™*
3. *Connecting to the Classroom: Vocabulary™*
4. *Connecting to the Classroom: Routines of a Polished Phonics Lesson™*
5. *Connecting to the Classroom: Planning Meaningful Fun For All Students While I Teach Small Groups™*

The Connecting to the Classroom™ training developed by Step By Step Learning® facilitates the movement of knowledge from the training to the teaching techniques in the classroom. Teachers need to be supported in ways that positively impact student performance. Training is one step, but the Connecting to the Classroom™ program bridges the gap between the research and classroom practice.





The LETRS® curricula is very complex. A small percentage of information is actually retained and implemented by teachers without expert-level coaching support by a certified LETRS® trainer following the training. Teachers don't have time to investigate and apply the research themselves, so we give them the Connecting to the Classroom™ support!

Contact a Step By Step Learning® associate to learn more!
 610-396-1231 | www.sbsl.org



*LETRS® is a registered trademark of Voyager Sopris Learning™ Group and any use herein does not imply endorsement or affiliation.

what we know” is a very powerful tool. Knowing how to apply what we learn about our students in the classroom has the most positive effects on their academic performance.



Mary Doe Donecker, Vice President of Step By Step Learning, LLC, comments, “When we are side-by-side with teachers, they can see, hear, and feel the difference in their instruction as we demonstrate and practice together their multi-tiered support with the students. Other providers don’t do this; they teach it and move on. We take the time – as much time as it takes – to make sure every teacher is comfortable and proficient in the Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) (was RtI or RtII) process.”

Dave Wright, Assistant Superintendent with Wilson Area School District, describes SBSL’s support in this way, “the in-classroom coaching gives our teachers an opportunity to put themselves out there in a safe and trusted environment, use the new tools and skills, and get immediate feedback as to what is working and what is not.”

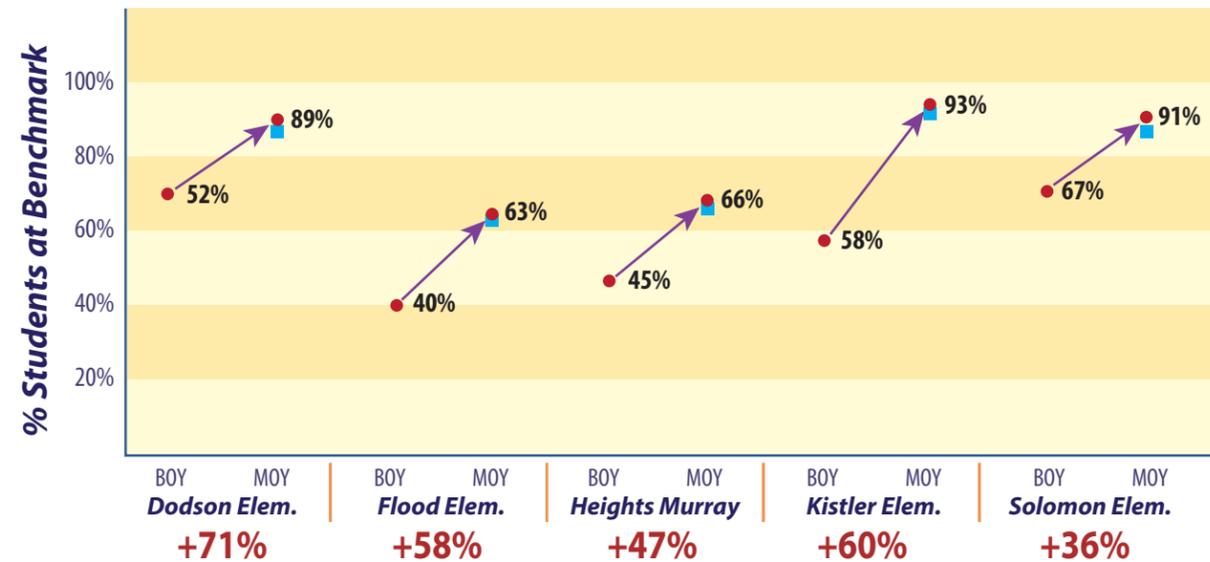
Step By Step Learning® brought a process and consistency to Wilson Area School District. Teachers assessed students and collected data on their progress, but didn’t really know what to do with the data after it was collected. Since Step By Step Learning® has partnered with Wilson, teachers now see more clearly what and where the problems are. Side-by-side training and coaching and learning how to develop effective small groups provided a method for looking at the problem and developing a plan of attack. They could now accurately determine which child needed what intervention, and for how long. Mr. Wright continues, “no one ever complained that a Step By Step Learning® consultant was in their classroom. No one felt like they were being evaluated, but instead they felt like they were partners, equally compassionate about teaching children to read.”

Most often, professional development opportunities are simply going to a presentation and then asking teachers to come back and perform what they learned. But Step By Step Learning’s® approach is so much better. Bill Beattie, Superintendent at Edison Local School District, concurs, “with Step By Step Learning®, it’s an on-going process of professional development that they provide to our teachers all school-year long that builds a sustainable solution for the academically at-risk students. Our teachers know this support is there, every day, when they need it, regardless of whether that support is in-person, side-by-side with the teacher, via a cyber-meeting, or over the phone.”

2013-2014 DIBELS® Next Data by Elementary School			
School	BOY	EOY	Growth
FLOOD	44%	88%	100%
KISTLER	52%	82%	58%
SOLOMON	66%	95%	44%
HEIGHTS	40%	72%	83%
DODSON	53%	85%	60%

The results at Wilkes-Barre are even more impressive when one realizes that the teachers have only 45 minutes of intervention time each day with a 120-minute literacy block. During the first year of program implementation, they averaged five, six, or seven intervention groups and could not see every child every day, even though at least 30-minutes of intervention every day is recommended. Throughout the District, there is limited parent involvement coupled with an urban, transient population that makes literacy improvements difficult to achieve and sustain. Some of the children may not be in the district long enough for sustained improvements to be achieved; and other children enter the school mid-year and do not benefit from full exposure to an intervention program. That was, however, before Step By Step Learning® was engaged by Wilkes-Barre Area School District.

The teachers embraced the program and overcame the transiency issue, bringing the new mid-year students up to the same levels as their classmates, as depicted in the following table:



With the transient population reflected by the black arrow and the fulltime students represented by the purple dotted line, it is apparent that, due to the diligence of the teachers and the robustness of the Step By Step Learning® program, the literacy challenge is being met in Wilkes-Barre Area School District.

The impressive and sustainable reading success in Wilkes-Barre’s elementary schools is proof that even in the most challenging of environments there are no excuses. Step By Step Learning® brings a sharp focus to what needs to be taught in the early grade levels and, not just what needs to be taught, but also why and when it needs to be taught. The process provides a laser focus to really pinpoint where a child is having difficulties and to isolate that issue and address it explicitly before moving on. The elementary teachers in Wilkes-Barre have combined both the art and the science of teaching reading and the Step By Step Learning® methodologies have become a permanent part of each teacher’s day.

Children who do not learn to read constitute approximately 17% of the population and comprise more than 50% of the special education population.⁵

“Step By Step Learning® has provided me the opportunity through professional development to implement effective reading strategies during systematic modeling and coaching. After incorporating these explicit teaching approaches it has allowed me to clearly address all of my student needs during small group interventions and core whole group instruction which has led to a positive impact on my student’s overall learning. Demonstrating this growth in my student’s achievement has been proof that ‘Working

Smarter Not Harder is the Secret! The last three years have been the most gratifying experience in my career and has revived my love of teaching. Thank you Step By Step Learning®!” – Kathleen Szafran, Kindergarten Teachers, Wilkes-Barre Area School District.

^{1,2,3,4,5} National Center for Learning Disabilities

Looking for a few great educators...



If you have a Masters degree, 5 years of elementary teaching experience, and would like to take your career to another level, get in touch with us immediately.

Join our team of literacy professionals in providing professional development, coaching and support to teachers in their classrooms.

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REFERENCES



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